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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 004178

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [KU](#)  
SUBJECT: ISLAMIC AFFAIRS MINISTRY CAMPAIGNS TO SPREAD  
ISLAMIC MODERATION

REF: A. KUWAIT 3877  
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 3650  
[1](#)C. KUWAIT 1741  
[1](#)D. KUWAIT 806  
[1](#)E. 05 KUWAIT 5289  
[1](#)F. 05 KUWAIT 5287  
[1](#)G. 05 KUWAIT 5283

Classified By: CDA Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary and Comment: Kuwait's Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs launched an initiative in 2005 to spread moderation among Muslims and present Islam as a moderate religion to non-Muslims. The Ministry has recently opened its World Moderation Center, a special agency to implement the initiative. Moderation activities, such as training of imams and Islamic studies teachers and international conferences, have taken place over the past 18 months and are ongoing. The Ministry has welcomed U.S. cooperation in the initiative. While the choice of the former head of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood to lead the World Moderation Center raises concerns, Post will continue to monitor the project to see if it can make a positive contribution to USG interests. End Summary and Comment.

[1](#)2. (SBU) As part of its ten-year strategic plan, the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs (MAIA) in 2005 determined that the theme of its activities would be to emphasize moderation ("Wasatiyya") in Islam. The plan has two foci: to combat extremism among Muslims and to show non-Muslims that Islam is a peaceful, tolerant and non-extremist religion. The GOK created an inter-agency committee, called the Higher Committee on Strengthening Moderation and chaired by the MAIA, to oversee the moderation plans. In order to develop and implement moderation-related activities, the MAIA founded and generously funded a special body called the World Moderation Center (WMC), organizationally a new division of the MAIA. The WMC, while perhaps not unique in the region in all respects, certainly signals a commitment on the part of a key GCC partner to begin addressing the need for a sustained public campaign aimed at stressing moderation and tolerance in Islamic thought and practice both at home and abroad.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) MAIA officials are convinced the initiative represents an important new voice in the international debate over the role and interpretation of Islam. Abdullah Muhammad Shehab, the MAIA's Assistant Undersecretary for Mosque Affairs, told PolOff in a recent meeting that Kuwait is now the only country to translate its words about addressing problems within the Muslim community into action.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The MAIA has already begun an ambitious series of conferences and training programs aimed both at foreign audiences (Muslim and non-Muslim) and at Kuwaiti religious

leaders. Planning is underway for expansion of these efforts, including conferences later this year and next year in the United States.

#### Moderation Training for Imams and Islamic Studies Teachers

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¶15. (C/NF) Over the past six months the WMC has given 45-day courses on moderation to 600 Kuwaiti imams. Shehab told PolOff that the training is mandatory for all imams, whose number he estimated at 750 - 950. While all those trained so far have been Sunnis, Shehab said that within the next year the WMC and the Ministry would strive to train all Shi'a imams as well as the Sunni imams who have not yet participated in the training. Dr. Issam Al-Basheer, the Secretary General of the WMC, told PolOff that 2,000 teachers

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of Islamic Studies in Kuwaiti primary and secondary schools will receive similar training over the next year. The Ministry has also conducted two moderation campaigns in Kuwaiti secondary schools over the past year. Shehab stressed that the training attempts to show Muslims that their own deep-seated beliefs point towards moderation, rather than imposing foreign concepts. According to Shehab, the Ministry is following up with those who participated in the training to make sure the lessons are being implemented.

#### Moderation Conferences for the International Muslim Community

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¶16. (C/NF) Kuwait has already hosted three moderation conferences (see refs D, E, F, and G for reports on two of them). High-ranking GOK officials as well as international Islamic figures including Shaykh Tantawi of Al-Azhar spoke at the conferences about eradicating extremism. The WMC will

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take the lead in organizing annual conferences in Kuwait. Kuwait is also sponsoring conferences outside of Kuwait, with a focus on addressing Muslim communities in Europe and the U.S. Abdullah Al-Maatouq, the Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, told the Ambassador on September 27 (ref A) that the 120 European Muslim participants in a conference held in May in London warned of the spread of extremism among European Muslims. This spurred Kuwait to rent a large building in Manchester where European imams can come for training and lectures on these moderation themes. The Washington moderation conference (November 17 - 19) has a similar goal: to gather American Muslims together to exchange ideas about their concerns, and how to spread a message of tolerance.

#### Moderation Conferences Addressing Non-Muslims

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¶17. (C/NF) In 2007, the GOK is planning a second round of conferences to address interfaith dialogue and the image of Islam in the West. Plans are already underway for a conference in London in February and a conference later in the year in the U.S. The focus of the latter conference will be determined by the issues raised at the November event in Washington. The WMC hopes to plan conferences in other European countries, Australia, China, and either Nigeria or South Africa.

#### Future Moderation Plans

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¶18. (C/NF) Al-Basheer reported to PolOff that there are plans for a magazine on moderation and that one of the major dailies in Kuwait (Al-Watan) has agreed to reserve a page every week for the GOK to print moderation material. MAIA U/S Al-Falah reported to the DCM that the Amir had authorized a moderation satellite channel. Al-Basheer told PolOff that the WMC will periodically hold seminars and lectures in Kuwait, such as an upcoming seminar on the proper use of

fatwas (religious rulings on the application of Islam to mundane matters) and one on the danger of takfeer (branding people as infidels). The WMC's future plans can be seen, according to Al-Basheer, in its organizational structure: it has units focusing on interfaith dialogue, research into the roots of Islamic Moderation, training current and educating future ulema (imams and Islamic scholars), and developing a website.

#### Improving Image of Islam in the West

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¶9. (C/NF) Al-Basheer said the Center would try to find common ground on which to build dialogue. He mentioned environmental issues as a potentially fruitful starting point since people of all religions and cultures had to face it together. The WMC's outreach strategy to non-Muslims appears to be less well-developed.

#### Call for Cooperation with U.S.

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¶10. (C/NF) Al-Basheer said the Center would very much like to cooperate with the United States in its activities. He said the center has an "open budget" and would be willing to host American speakers, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to come to Kuwait, and lecture during the training courses or in separate seminars on topics related to moderation in Islam (Note: Post will examine these possibilities further).

#### Opportunity for Improving U.S. Relations with Muslim world

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¶11. (C/NF) Comment: The GOK's moderation initiative, at least in its conception, represents the sort of initiative that many liberal voices in the region have been calling for. However, the initiative is not without its critics, with some expressing concern that its "moderation" might not be moderate enough. "Moderate" is a label embraced by a wide range of Muslim views and agendas in the region, and as Shehab pointed out to PolOff, even the extremists think they are moderates. The choice of the former leader of Sudan's Muslim Brotherhood, who left amid questions of financial impropriety (see Bio Note), to head the WMC also raises questions. Post will continue to investigate the MAIA's moderation initiative, including the WMC, and its teaching materials to better determine if it can be a useful partner. End Comment.

#### Bio Note

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¶12. (C/NF) WMC Director Dr. Issam Al-Basheer reported to PolOff that he was Sudan's Minister of Awqaf for four years and eight months from 2001 through 2005. He also said he was a member of parliament from 1992 until 1996. At the end of his tenure as Minister he had already accepted the Moderation position and was shuttling back and forth between Kuwait and Sudan. Sometime in the first half of 2006 he moved to Kuwait permanently.

¶13. (C/NF) Embassy Khartoum reports the following: Al-Basheer was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood Party in Sudan, and served as its Secretary General from 2002-2005. In 2005, he left the party and his post as minister, though it is unclear if he resigned or was fired. After leaving the Muslim Brotherhood, he joined the ruling NCP party (which is aligned with Muslim Brotherhood) and was re-appointed Minister of Guidance and Endowments (Awqaf). He was not included in the national unity government when it formed in ¶2005. He has twice been a member of the National Assembly. There are rumors that his dispute with the Muslim Brotherhood Party stemmed from the fact that he was embezzling large sums of money in his government post and not spreading it around.

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